



Musical Soiree

One day last month I had a chance to attend a small private piano recital. One of the collectors of my work, an American woman who lives in Tokyo, had asked a British pianist to perform in her home, and had invited some of her friends and acquaintances to attend. I was happy to say 'yes' to her invitation, because it's been more years than I can remember since I had a chance to attend a gathering like this.

When I myself was a young musician, I was for a time on the roster of a booking agency that promoted living-room concerts of this type. People who live in smaller communities around Canada don't have much chance to see live music other than rock and roll bands, so are usually eager to play host to young classical musicians who are willing to travel to their towns to play.

Our concerts were sometimes held in community centers or church halls, but most often in somebody's living room. They would push back the furniture, bring in some rental chairs, and turn their home into a comfortable place for a session of chamber music. After each performance, we would have dinner with our hosts, and then the members of our group would be billeted for the night with local people, before getting into our car in the morning to move on to another town for the next concert.

I enjoyed doing this kind of concert very much, as it was the best possible combination: audiences that were always very eager to hear the music, and young performers who were just at the beginning of their careers, and full of enthusiasm for making music.

So this concert last month was quite interesting for me, as I have never had an opportunity to be on 'the other side' - to be part of the audience for an afternoon of music 'at home'. It was a bit different from the concerts I had given, because the pianist this time wasn't a young 'up-and-comer', but rather a more established performer in the middle of his career. Happily though, the performance wasn't the rigorously formal and highly polished sort of affair we usually associate with piano recitals in Japan, but was much more casual - no white tie and tails this time! This suited me fine, as these days we can hear 'perfect' recital performances anytime just by popping a CD into our player, but what we miss is of course any sense of personal contact with the performer.

My brother, who is a professional musician making his living as a saxophone player in Germany, is convinced that recordings have 'killed' live music. Part of this is that because we have access to inexpensive recordings we no longer need to hire live musicians, but over and above this is the way that repeated exposure to those 'perfect' recordings has raised standards so high that to be a 'merely average' musician is no longer acceptable.

During the concert the other day, we could tell during the first number that the pianist was struggling a bit with an instrument that was strange to him, and a few wrong notes flashed by. But he soon settled down, as did we, and the afternoon passed very pleasantly.

I do have to admit to a little bit of daydreaming during the performance; I was trying to imagine what I would look like up at the front of the room with a flute in my hands, but I had to shake off such thoughts. After all, more than twenty years has now passed since I last opened my flute case ... and you had better believe that there would be more than a few wrong notes flashing by if I ever dared to try again!

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